

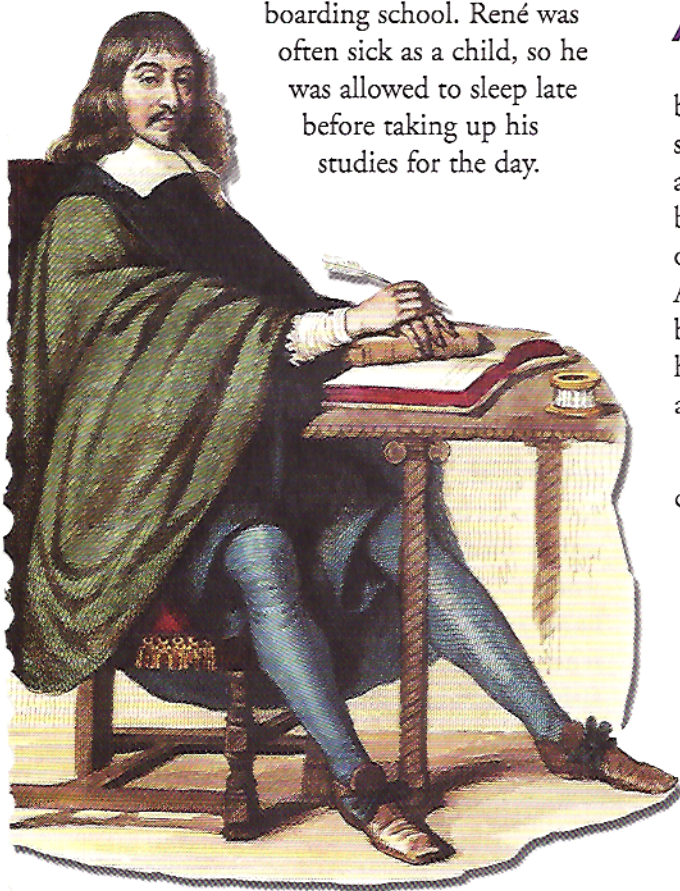


he Soldier The young soldier sat writing in his tent. He was a frail, well-educated French gentleman. It was not unusual for young gentlemen of the seventeenth century to become soldiers of fortune—that is, soldiers who joined armies not to fight for a great cause but for travel and adventure.

This fellow was not writing a letter home or jotting notes about the day's events. He was recording ideas about the workings of the universe and how we know what we know. The young soldier was René Descartes (ruh NAY day KAHRT). He would become known as the father of modern **philosophy**. As you read on, you'll get to know this young soldier and learn how he began a revolution in thought.

Young René

As a boy, René Descartes lived with his grandmother. His mother had died when he was around one year old. René enjoyed being alone in the garden, with time to think. Shortly after turning ten, he was sent off to boarding school. René was often sick as a child, so he was allowed to sleep late before taking up his studies for the day.



After boarding school, René went on to study law because his family expected him to. However, he had no real interest in law. As a young man, René still enjoyed sleeping late and being alone to think, but he also discovered that he loved to travel.

vocabulary

philosophy the study of human thought about the meaning of life and the natural world

This love of travel may be the reason René joined the army. At 22 he went to Holland (today called the Netherlands) and signed on as an unpaid officer in the Dutch army.

Awakening

During his time in Holland, Descartes became fascinated with mathematics and wrote several papers on the subject. He spent just over a year there. Then he traveled for a summer before joining the Bavarian army. (Bavaria was once a kingdom; today it is part of Germany.) A soldier's life is usually pictured as a hard one, but in Bavaria, Descartes managed to keep up his old habits of rising late and spending time alone with his thoughts.

He was content with life until the snows came and temperatures quickly dropped below freezing. It was during this time, when Descartes spent long hours huddled up for warmth and deep in thought, that he had two important insights. He described them as moments of light that showed him great truths about life.

Descartes spent much of his life thinking and writing.

"I Think, Therefore I Am"

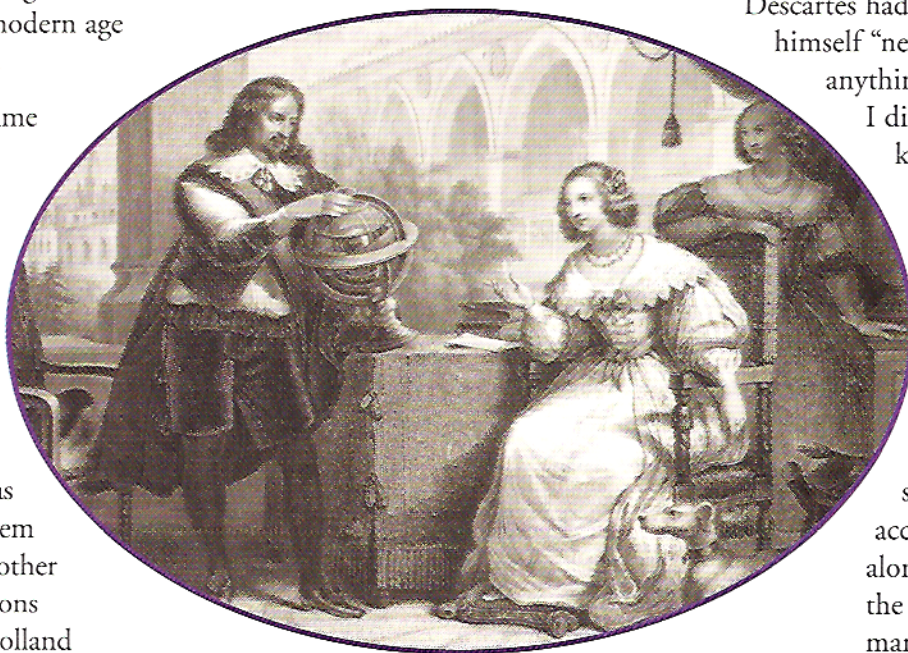
Although Descartes was a devout Catholic and always kept a strong belief in God, he also placed high value on human reason. He used reason to explore the human condition and to explain his belief in God. Descartes' use of reason began what we know today as the modern age of philosophy.

After his time in the army, Descartes went back to Holland. If you were a young thinker, that was the place to explore new ideas and express them freely. Unlike other European nations at the time, Holland did not punish those who questioned religious or political traditions. Seventeenth-century Holland became the center of the European printing industry, and new ideas thrived there as nowhere else in Europe.

Descartes became best known for his book *Discourse on Method*. In its introduction he takes his reader back to the winter in snow-covered Bavaria. He explains that it was there that he began to doubt and to question. He bases his thinking on the idea that there is only one thing in this world we can be sure of—our thoughts and therefore our own existence.

Descartes writes, "There is just one thing that is undeniable: I am thinking. This alone proves my existence." He recognized that whether his thoughts were right or wrong, they were his thoughts. If he was thinking them, he must, in fact, exist. He concludes in Latin: *Cogito ergo sum*. In English this means: "I think, therefore I am."

With this certainty about his own existence and reasoning powers, Descartes set out to question everything else in the universe. He left this message for other truth-seekers: "It is not enough just to have a fine mind; the main thing is to learn how to apply it properly."



Descartes had an eager student in the queen of Sweden.

Descartes had promised himself "never to accept anything as true if I did not clearly know it to be so. . . ." The notion that the truths of the universe could be learned by observation and reason, and not accepted by faith alone, changed the thinking of many people. Descartes encouraged people to doubt everything

except their own existence until they proved each thing to be true.

The Price of Fame

Descartes became famous throughout Europe. When his work caught the attention of 23-year-old Queen Christina of Sweden, she invited him to her court. The idea of a long trip to chilly Sweden did not excite the 53-year-old philosopher. But the young queen got her way.

A brisk sleigh ride over icy streets began each day of Descartes's ill-fated visit. He was used to sleeping late and always hated the cold. Within two weeks he had pneumonia. The great philosopher died in Sweden, having introduced the world to a new way of thinking about what we know and how we know it. Because of his insistence on reason, we remember Descartes as the father of modern philosophy.



Long Life An Englishman living in the seventeenth century had little chance of living past the age of 40. Against all odds, Thomas Hobbes more than doubled that life expectancy. Born in 1588 in the English village of Malmesbury, Hobbes lived to be 91. It was a long and difficult life.

This was a stormy era for his country's government, and through it all, Hobbes had something to say. Often his ideas were not what people wanted to hear. At times he was forced to flee for his life and burn his own writings. Thomas Hobbes was certainly not the most popular philosopher of his times. Who was this man? And what did he say that put people in such an uproar?

Young Thomas Hobbes

Thomas entered Oxford University when he was only 15 years old. By the standards of the time, that was young to be entering college, but not as young as you might think. The typical student began university studies between 16 and 18.

After graduation, Hobbes became a tutor for the son of a nobleman. His position included traveling with his pupil, who was only a few years younger than he was. Hobbes would continue his tutoring career for many years. Traveling abroad in Europe with young noblemen gave him the chance to meet interesting people. In France, Hobbes met with Descartes ("I think, therefore I am."), whom you met in the last lesson.

Each time Hobbes returned to England, he came back to political unrest. The problem was a conflict between the king and Parliament. The ruling monarchs in those days, the Stuarts, believed in the divine right of kings. These rulers did not want to grant Parliament any law-making powers. The struggle between Parliament and the king went on for decades.

Hobbes supported the king in this conflict. When he saw Parliament threatening to take control from the Stuarts, he worried about his own safety. The philosopher fled to Paris.

The English Parliament did finally seize control. King Charles I was tried before a court, convicted, and executed. His son, Prince Charles, sought safety in Paris, where Hobbes tutored him in mathematics. This became a friendship that would one day protect Hobbes.

Hobbes Is Heard

With an eye on the ever-changing and often violent English political scene, Hobbes drew his own conclusions about the purpose and nature of government. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, Hobbes observed events and used his mind to reason about what should be.

Hobbes put forth his ideas in several works. His most famous book, *Leviathan* (luh VYE uh thun), was published while Hobbes was in France. A leviathan had appeared in the Bible as a sea monster, an all-powerful ruler of the seas. In his book, Hobbes argues that government should be powerful, like the leviathan.



The monster, leviathan, is pictured on the title page of Hobbes' book.

Hobbes provided reasons why he thought government should be all-powerful. He started by describing human beings in what he called the “state of nature.” Hobbes said that people are naturally cruel, greedy, and selfish. He explained that they have two main desires: to feel pleasure and to avoid pain. People will do just about anything to meet those selfish ends, Hobbes believed.

Since people were so naturally selfish, Hobbes did not expect that people, left to their own devices, could be trusted to make choices that would benefit the entire community or even preserve order.

Hobbes was a **pessimist** about human beings, and it was his pessimism about human nature that made him believe in strong government. Hobbes looked at the chaos and war of his own century and concluded that, without a strong government, people would live in a constant state of war. In his most famous statement, Hobbes said that, without government, human life would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

What should be done about this unhappy condition? Was there any hope? Hobbes thought a strong government was the answer. He wrote that people must enter into a “social contract.” They must give up their individual freedoms and turn them over to a powerful leader or assembly. Strong leaders, strict laws, and stiff punishments would protect selfish individuals from making war on each other. Society would best be served, Hobbes believed, by an absolute monarchy—an all-powerful ruler. Only such a government could ensure peace and safety.

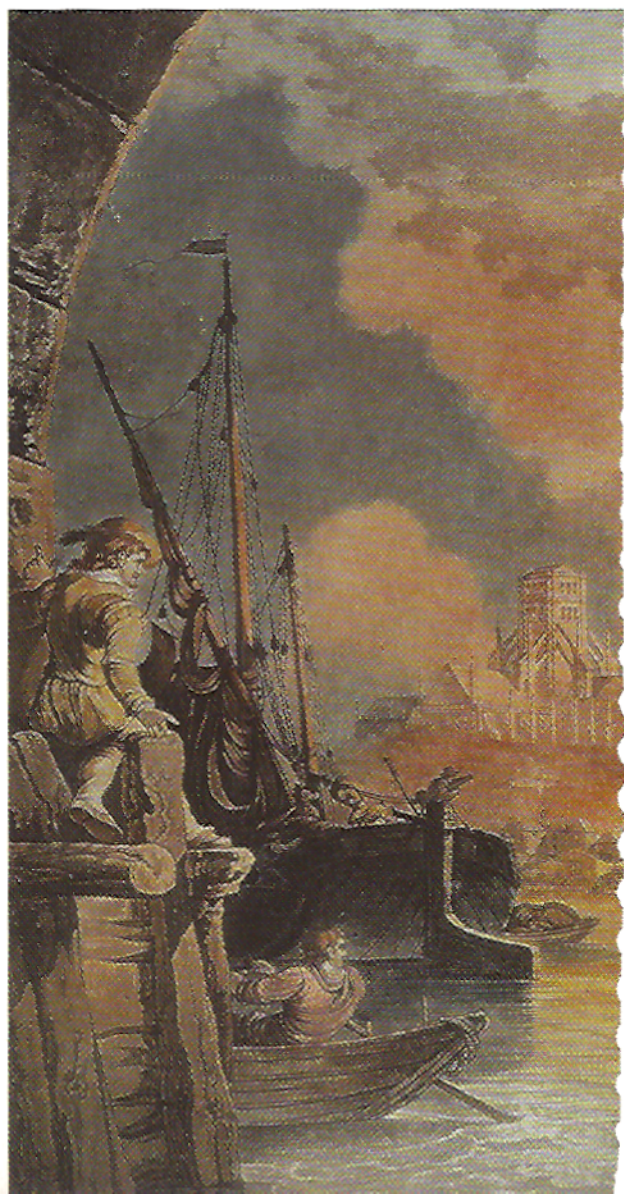
You might ask, What about freedom? Did Hobbes picture a world in which everyone was a slave to government? Hobbes’ argument may surprise you by its logic and the way in which he defines freedom. Hobbes argued that real human freedom is the ability to live peacefully without

being threatened by others. Since, in his opinion, people are naturally selfish and cruel, there must be strong laws to protect us from each other. A forceful government, according to Hobbes, does not limit a person’s liberty. Quite the opposite. It is the forceful government protecting people from their worst impulses that actually makes liberty possible.

Pupil Crowned King

When things quieted down in England, Hobbes went home. In 1660 the monarchy was restored and his former pupil, Prince Charles, became King Charles II. For several years, Hobbes published his ideas without incident. Then came two terrible years for the English. The plague swept England in 1665, and a great fire destroyed much of London in 1666. People sought comfort in their religious faith, and soon anyone who spoke against religion was in trouble.

vocabulary
pessimist someone who believes the worst will happen



Many people saw Hobbes and his ideas about the brutish nature of human beings as unchristian. They wanted to ban *Leviathan* and banish the philosopher. Fearful for his own safety, Hobbes burned many of his papers. Luckily, his old pupil King Charles II spoke up for the philosopher and protected him. The king did, however, forbid Hobbes to publish any more writings. When Hobbes presented another major work, *Behemoth* (bih HEE muth), the king banned its publication. *Behemoth* was not published until three years after Hobbes' death.

Hobbes' Importance

In his old age, fellow philosophers and scientists largely ignored Hobbes. Although he insisted on his own belief in God, most saw him as a threat to religion. He continued to submit papers, but his

works were turned away. The elderly Hobbes has been described as an angry, bitter man.

So why was Hobbes important? He put forth a dark view of human nature and a very **authoritarian** model of how society should be organized. People as individuals, he contended, are not basically good. A strong government or a strong leader is necessary to make the laws for the peace and safety of the population. Keep his ideas in mind as you read on.

And get ready to meet other thinkers whose views differed sharply from those of Thomas Hobbes.

vocabulary

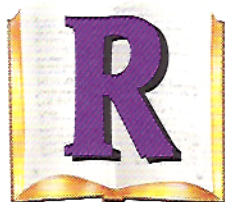
authoritarian

presented as if from an expert or an authority

During the fire of 1666, Londoners sought safety wherever they could.



4 John Locke



Rights Versus Rulers

- *People have certain natural rights.*
- *A monarch's right to rule depends on the consent of the people.*
- *If a monarch rules badly, people can and should throw him out.*

These were bold ideas in seventeenth-century England. People could get in big trouble for having such thoughts. Yet the Enlightenment spirit and confidence in human reason gave the English philosopher John Locke the courage to speak his mind. Locke had ideas about government that were very different from those of Thomas Hobbes. While Hobbes believed government should be all-powerful, Locke believed the job of government was to protect the natural rights or liberty of its subjects. If the government fails to do that, he said, the people should overturn it and create a new government.

The King's Scholar

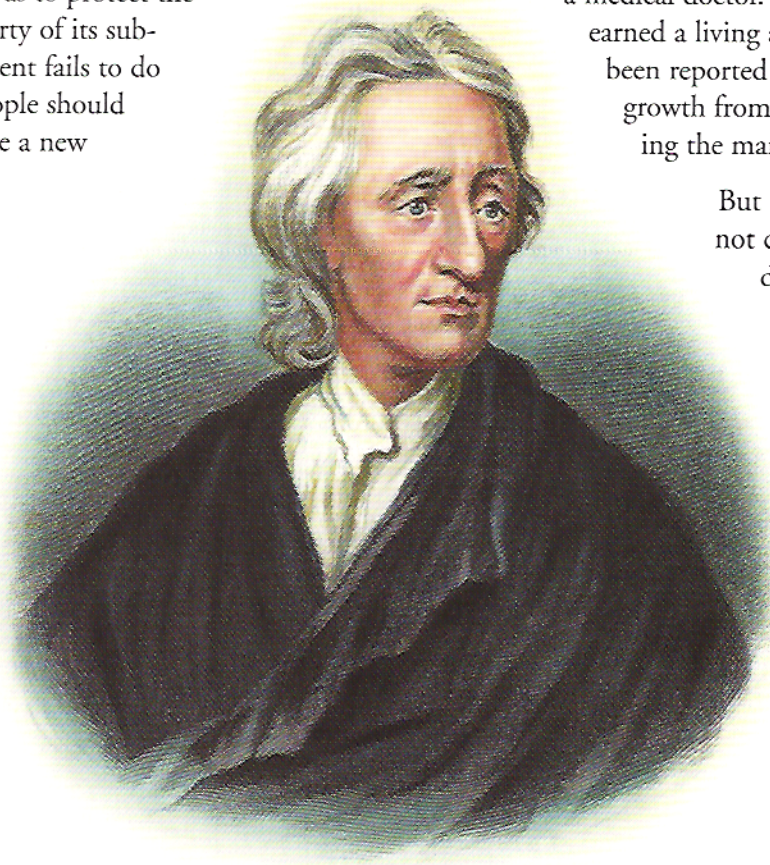
Young John Locke was a fine student. He was named a "king's scholar" at Westminster School and awarded a scholarship to Oxford University.

Locke spent 30 years studying, tutoring, and writing at Oxford.

For thinkers like John Locke, the late 1600s were good years to be in school. Teachers encouraged students to use reason and to experiment, to think deeply about everything from science and government to religious faith.

Locke studied medicine and became a medical doctor. Although he never earned a living as a doctor, it has been reported that he removed a growth from a friend's liver, saving the man's life.

But Locke's fame did not come from being a doctor. Instead, he became known for his writings about human knowledge and politics. John Locke's ideas launched a new era of thought in England. Then they echoed around the world.



John Locke had faith in people's ability to learn to live together peacefully.

Locke on Knowledge: The Blank Page

What book was tops on the best-seller list in the late seventeenth century? Everyone who was anyone was reading Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In this book, Locke put forth an important idea about the way human beings think and learn. Each person, he stated, comes into this world with a mind like a *tabula rasa*—that's Latin for a "blank tablet," like a blank sheet of paper. We have no knowledge at birth, said Locke. Instead, all of our knowledge comes through experience.

Locke explained, "If a child were kept in a place where he never saw any other [color] but black and white till he were a man, he would have no . . . ideas of scarlet or green. . . ."

So how do we get the ideas to fill up our blank page? According to Locke, our senses provide us with experience. We learn about our world by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. We reflect on, or think about, the sensations. We compare them and judge them and then make decisions about our lives.

While Thomas Hobbes described people as being naturally selfish and war-like, Locke took a very different view. He saw human nature as neither good and kind nor bad and violent. He explained that people become what they are because of the events they experience. A person who has known only fighting and cruelty will likely be violent and cruel. In a later book on education, Locke advised parents to treat their children with tenderness and kindness, so that they too would learn to be kind.

Locke's revolutionary ideas had an effect in France, Poland, Naples, and other European states, as well as in our country.

Locke on Politics: "Life, Liberty, and Property"

John Locke believed that people, given the right experiences, would be reasonable and moral. He also believed that all people are born with certain natural rights. These, he insisted, included the right to "life, liberty, and property." Locke took a bold stand. It is the government's *duty*, he declared, to preserve the rights of the citizens. What happens if a government denies people their rights or fails to protect those rights? Locke declared that if a government fails to protect the natural rights of its people, those people have the right to overthrow the government. Yes, he suggested revolution. It was an idea that would sweep across the seas to England's American colonies and through Europe.

The Mysterious Dr. van der Linden

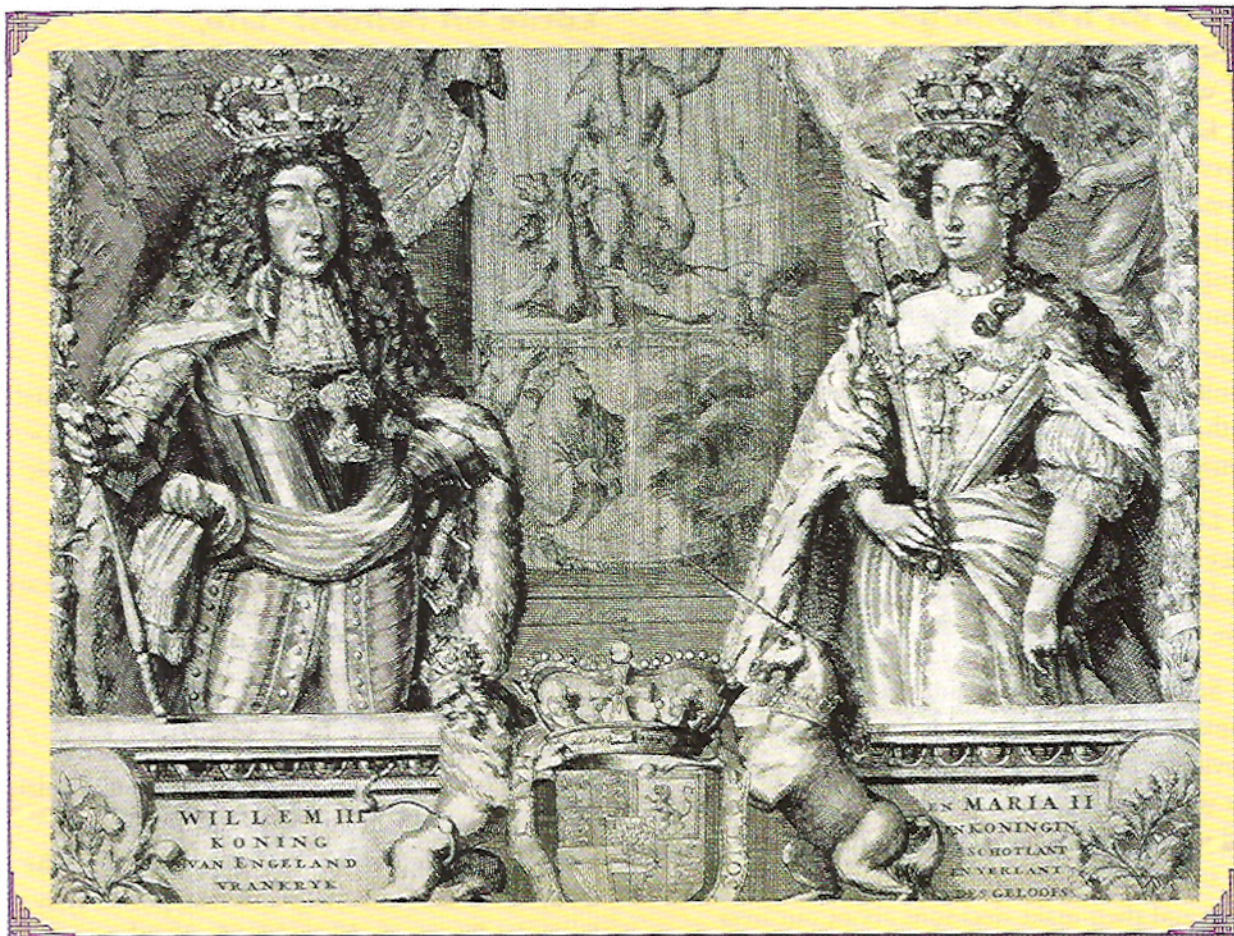
When King James II sat on the throne of England in the 1680s, he was an unpopular ruler. He set aside Parliament's laws and appointed Catholics to high offices. Many people feared he would disband Parliament and take power away from the Protestant Church of England.

King James was not a fan of John Locke. He was well aware of Locke's political views. Unlike Hobbes, who had favored an absolute monarchy, Locke had sided with Parliament in its struggle against the Stuarts.

Now there were rumors that

Locke supported a plot to overthrow the crown. The philosopher's name soon appeared on a list of persons wanted for treason.

Fearing for his life, Locke fled to Holland. He went into hiding under the name Dr. van der Linden and used the time to complete his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke was not about to be silenced by threats. He wrote that he would continue to love and seek the truth without worrying about "whom it pleases or displeases."



William and Mary are shown here with all the symbols—crowns, scepters, and the royal coat of arms—of English monarchs.

While in Holland, Locke met Prince William of Orange, husband of James II's daughter Mary. Locke became one of Prince William's supporters. In 1688, Parliament unseated King James II and invited William and Mary to come from Holland to take the English throne. Locke returned to England acting as a companion to Mary. For Locke it was more than a chance to return home in safety. John Locke was a philosopher who got to see his ideas become part of history.

Parliament attached conditions to the invitation to William and Mary. To become king and queen, William and Mary had to give up many of their royal powers to Parliament, limiting the strength of the monarchy. Parliament also called for a Bill of Rights.

This change in government in 1688 was called the Glorious Revolution. Unlike most revolutions, there was no bloodshed or violence, but it was one of the most important changes in government in history. From 1688 onward, no king or queen could rule in England without the consent of Parliament. England had taken a giant step on the path of liberty.

Locke's **radical** ideas had become a reality. The English people had overthrown one ruler and replaced him with another ruler who respected their natural rights. It would not be the last time that this would happen in modern history.

vocabulary
radical relating to
 great changes or
 reforms